**Rosh Hashanah**

[**Find this year's date in the multifaith calendar**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/faith.shtml?jewish)



Cantor Edwin Ross playing the Shofar [**©**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/copyright.shtml#unknown)

On the first day of the seventh month hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. It is a day for you to sound the trumpets.*Numbers 29:1*

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year festival and commemorates the creation of the world. It lasts 2 days. The traditional greeting between Jews is "L'shanah tovah" ... for a good New Year.

Rosh Hashanah is also a judgement day, when Jews believe that God balances a person's good deeds over the last year against their bad deeds, and decides what the next year will be like for them.

God records the judgement in the Book of Life, where he sets out who is going to live, who is going to die, who will have a good time and who will have a bad time during the next year. The book and the judgement are finally sealed on Yom Kippur.

That's why another traditional Rosh Hashanah greeting is "Be inscribed and sealed for a good year" .

**In the synagogue**

A lot of time is spent in the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, when there are special services that emphasise God's kingship.

One of the synagogue rituals for Rosh Hashanah is the blowing of the Shofar, a ram's horn trumpet. A hundred notes are sounded in a special rhythm.

[**Listen to demonstration of the Shofar by Cantor Edwin Ross (00:18)**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/realmedia/religions/judaism/rosh_horn.ram)

**In the Home**



New Year isn't only celebrated in the synagogue, but at home too. A special meal is served, with the emphasis on sweetness.

Apples are dipped in honey, as a symbol of the sweet New Year that each Jew hopes lies ahead. A sweet carrot stew called a tzimmes is often served.



And at New Year the Jewish Hallah (or Challah) bread served comes as a round loaf, rather than the plaited loaf served on the Sabbath, so as to symbolise a circle of life and of the year.

There's often a pomegranate on the table because of a tradition that pomegranates have 613 seeds, one for each of the commandments that a Jew is obliged to keep.

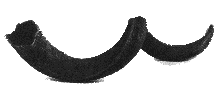
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| **Rosh Hashanah  Rosh Hashanah (in Hebrew)**  ***Level: Basic*** | **Significance:** New Year **Observances:** Sounding the shofar (ram's horn trumpet) **Length:** 2 Days (Some: 1 Day) **Customs:** Dipping apples in honey; Casting off "sins" into a river **Greeting:** L'shanah tovah! (For a good year!) |

*...In the seventh month, on the first of the month, there shall be a sabbath for you, a remembrance with shofar blasts, a holy convocation.* -Leviticus 16:24

Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of [Tishri](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/tishri.htm). In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah means, literally, "head of the year" or "first of the year." Rosh Hashanah is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This name is somewhat deceptive, because there is little similarity between Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year, and the American midnight drinking bash and daytime football game.

There is, however, one important similarity between the Jewish New Year and the American one: Many Americans use the New Year as a time to plan a better life, making "resolutions." Likewise, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year. More on this concept at [Days of Awe](http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday3.htm).

The name "Rosh Hashanah" is not used in the Bible to discuss this holiday. The Bible refers to the holiday as Yom Ha-Zikkaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar). The holiday is instituted in Leviticus 23:24-25.

[[](http://www.jewfaq.org/sound/shofar.mid)](http://www.jewfaq.org/sound/shofar.mid)The shofar is a ram's horn which is blown somewhat like a trumpet. One of the most important observances of this holiday is hearing the sounding of the shofar in the [synagogue](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/synagogue.htm). A total of 100 notes are sounded each day. There are four different types of shofar notes: tekiah, a 3 second sustained note; shevarim, three 1-second notes rising in tone, teruah, a series of short, staccato notes extending over a period of about 3 seconds; and tekiah gedolah (literally, "big tekiah"), the final blast in a set, which lasts (I think) 10 seconds minimum. Click the shofar above to hear an approximation of the sound of Tekiah Shevarim-Teruah Tekiah. The Bible gives no specific reason for this practice. One that has been suggested is that the shofar's sound is a call to repentance. The shofar is not blown if the holiday falls on [Shabbat](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/shabbat.htm).

No [work](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/work.htm) is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. Much of the day is spent in [synagogue](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/synagogue.htm), where the regular daily [liturgy](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/liturgy.htm) is somewhat expanded. In fact, there is a special prayerbook called the machzor used for Rosh Hashanah and [Yom Kippur](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/yomkippur.htm) because of the extensive liturgical changes for these holidays.

Another popular observance during this holiday is eating apples dipped in honey, a symbol of our wish for a sweet new year. This was the second Jewish religious practice I was ever exposed to (the first one: lighting [Chanukkah](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/chanukkah.htm) candles), and I highly recommend it. It's yummy. We also dip bread in honey (instead of the usual practice of sprinkling salt on it) at this time of year for the same reason.

Another popular practice of the holiday is Tashlikh ("casting off"). We walk to flowing water, such as a creek or river, on the afternoon of the first day and empty our pockets into the river, symbolically casting off our sins. Small pieces of bread are commonly put in the pocket to cast off. This practice is not discussed in the Bible, but is a long-standing custom. Tashlikh is normally observed on the afternoon of the first day, before afternoon services. When the first day occurs on [Shabbat](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/shabbat.htm), many synagogues observe Tashlikh on Sunday afternoon, to avoid carrying (the bread) on Shabbat.

Religious services for the holiday focus on the concept of [G-d](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/g-d.htm)'s sovereignty.

The common greeting at this time is L'shanah tovah ("for a good year"). This is a shortening of "L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem" (or to women, "L'shanah tovah tikatevi v'taihatemi"), which means "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year." More on that concept at [Days of Awe](http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday3.htm).

You may notice that the Bible speaks of Rosh Hashanah as occurring on the first day of the seventh month. The first month of the [Jewish calendar](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/calendar.htm) is Nissan, occurring in March and April. Why, then, does the Jewish "new year" occur in Tishri, the seventh month?

Judaism has several different "new years," a concept which may seem strange at first, but think of it this way: the American "new year" starts in January, but the new "school year" starts in September, and many businesses have "fiscal years" that start at various times of the year. In Judaism, Nissan 1 is the new year for the purpose of counting the reign of kings and months on the calendar, Elul 1 (in August) is the new year for the tithing of animals, [Shevat 15](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/tu.htm) (in February) is the new year for trees (determining when first fruits can be eaten, etc.), and Tishri 1 (Rosh Hashanah) is the new year for years (when we increase the year number. Sabbatical and Jubilee years begin at this time).

See [Extra Day of Jewish Holidays](http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday0.htm#Extra) for an explanation of why this holiday is celebrated for two days instead of the one specified in the Bible.

**List of Dates**

Rosh Hashanah will occur on the following days of the Gregorian calendar:

* Jewish Year 5769: sunset September 29, 2008 - nightfall October 1, 2008
* Jewish Year 5770: sunset September 18, 2009 - nightfall September 20, 2009
* Jewish Year 5771: sunset September 8, 2010 - nightfall September 10, 2010
* Jewish Year 5772: sunset September 28, 2011 - nightfall September 30, 2011
* Jewish Year 5773: sunset September 16, 2012 - nightfall September 18, 2012

# Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year)

http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/images/roshapplecandlehorn_small1.jpg

**Rosh Hashanah** means "head of the year" and is commonly known as the **Jewish New Year**. It is the day on which the year number changes, but unlike secular New Year celebrations, Rosh Hashanah is a solemn and holy time. It occurs on the first and second days of Tishri, which falls in September or October.

History and Meaning of Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is instituted in Leviticus 23:23-25:

And HaShem spoke unto Moses, saying: "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation. Ye shall do no manner of servile work; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto HaShem." [{1}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#1)

In the Bible, Rosh Hashanah is called Yom Teruah (Day of the Shofar) or Yom Ha-Zikkaron (Day of Remembrance). The name "**Day of the Shofar**" refers to the characteristic blasts of the shofar that are heard on this day (see [Rosh Hashanah Observances](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#observances), below).

"**Day of Remembrance**" signifies that on this day Jews commemorate the creation of the world and are reminded of their responsibilities as God's chosen people. [{2}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#2)

Rosh Hashanah is also known as the Day of Judgment, for it is believed that on this day God judges all of his people and decides on their fate in the next year. Rosh Hashanah (along with the Days of Awe that follow) is a time of reviewing and repairing one's relationship with God, the Supreme Judge. [{3}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#3)

Observances of Rosh Hashanah

A distinctive feature of Rosh Hashanah is the **shofar blast**, which fulfills the biblical command for a "blast of horns" in Leviticus 23:24 and Numbers 29:1. A total of 100 blasts are sounded from the synagogue on each day of Rosh Hashanah, using four different tones. The shofar is not blown if Rosh Hashanah falls on a Sabbath. [{4}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#4) The great rabbi Maimonides regarded the shofar blast as

an allusion, as if to say, "Awake, O you sleepers, awake from your sleep! O you slumberers, awake from your slumber! Search your deeds and turn in repentance!" [{5}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#5)

No work is permitted on Rosh Hashanah, and most of the day is spent in **synagogue**. There is a special, longer liturgy for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The services on both days center on the theme of God's sovereignty. [{6}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#6)

Rosh Hashanah is not a time of fasting. In fact, several special foods are prepared for Rosh Hashanah. The most popular food-related custom is eating **apples and bread dipped in honey** to symbolize a sweet new year. After the apple is dipped in honey, the following blessing is said over the fruit:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, king of the universe,  
who creates the fruit of the tree. Amen.

Then, after taking a bite of the apple, this short prayer is recited:

May it be Your will,   
Lord our God and God of our ancestors,  
that you renew for us a good and sweet year. [{7}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#7)

On Rosh Hashanah, **Challah** bread, normally braided, may be baked into round shapes to symbolize the cyclical nature of the year, baked with raisins for a sweet new year, or shaped into a ladder or bird to express the wish that the family's prayers would rise to heaven. [{8}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#8)

**Fish** is also traditionally part of the Rosh Hashanah meal, for it is a traditional symbol of fertility and prosperity. It also represents knowledge since its eyes are always open. Traditionally, the head of the fish is placed before the head of the family, who prays, "May it be your will that we be like the head (leaders) and not like the tail (followers)." [{9}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#9)

**Pomegranate** is often part of the holiday meal as well. It is said to have 613 seeds, which is the number of mitzvot (commandments). The pomegranate therefore serves to remind God of the obedience of the family in the prior year. [{10}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#10)

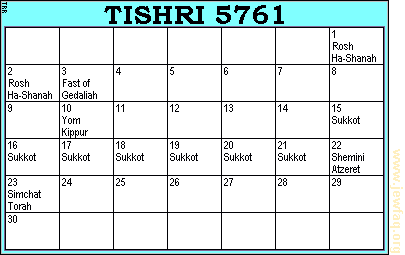
In another long-standing tradition, called **Tashlikh** ("casting off"), worshippers walk to a creek or a river and empty their pockets or cast bread crumbs into it, symbolizing the casting off of their sins of the previous year. This is usually done on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah. [{11}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#11) In many communities, the Tashlikh has become a very social occasion, as numerous people from different neighborhoods descend on the same body of water for the ritual. [{12}](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/holidays/rosh.htm#12)

Dates for Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah will fall on the following dates on the Gregorian calendar:

* Jewish Year 5766: October 3-5, 2005
* Jewish Year 5767: September 22-24, 2006
* Jewish Year 5768: September 12-14, 2007

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| **The Month of Tishri  Tishri (in Hebrew)**  ***Level: Basic*** | • Tishri falls in September/October • It is the busiest holiday month |



The month of [Tishri](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/tishri.htm), which falls during the months of September and October on the Gregorian calendar, is probably the busiest time of the year for Jewish holidays. In the month of Tishri, there are a total of 13 days of special religious significance, 7 of them holidays on which work is not permitted.

These holidays include the holidays known as the "High Holidays," the most important holidays of the Jewish year: [Rosh Hashanah](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/rosh.htm) and [Yom Kippur](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/yomkippur.htm). A 1990 survey showed that only 40% of all Jews affiliate themselves with a [synagogue](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/synagogue.htm), but 55% attend synagogue on these holidays. If a Jew ever goes to synagogue (other than for [weddings](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/wedding.htm) or [bar mitzvahs](http://www.jewfaq.org/defs/barmitz.htm)), it is for these holidays.